

How to Fast Your Way to Longer Life

Several years ago, I read a fascinating science article that referenced ongoing research in the area of fasting (what scientists call “caloric restriction” or “intermittent fasting”). The findings immediately caught my attention. Although in the past I had fasted regularly, I gradually had stopped. Now, jolted by news of the promising prospects of fasting, I initiated a thorough review of scientific research covering the previous seven decades. The sheer volume of credible research pointing to the immense health benefits of fasting overwhelmed me. The results staring me in the face forced me to change my habits. Returning to my roots, I resumed intermittent fasting.

Next, the medical writer in me took over. I wondered why so many people seemed unaware of these studies. I came away convinced that now is the time to help the public become aware of fasting’s health benefits.

What you will read here are pure scientific facts. No hype. No exaggerations. This is not a faddish diet or weight loss program. I am a medicinal chemist, not a dietician. I am confident that, given the raw scientific facts in reasonably understandable language, people will make up their own minds and apply such facts accordingly. Studies in this area are still ongoing.

Still, almost every bit of credible research on animal models (from rats to monkeys), as well as humans, has shown a significant improvement in the ability of fasting to reduce the risk of such major diseases as cancer, diabetes, stroke and cardiovascular and neurodegenerative diseases—in some cases, by reductions of up to 50 percent.

Live Longer and Stronger

There is credible biomedical evidence that fasting improves health span, both in animal and human studies. This is what inspired me to distill some of this evidence and provide easily understood explanations of how fasting can improve your health, including your health span. Calorie restriction (CR) or fasting delays the development of age-associated diseases and increases health span in rodents, monkeys and humans.

What is health span? Simply put, health span is the time of life in which we are free from disposition to disease. A strong health span reflects an increased quality of life and prolonged health during our senior years. Radically different from life span, health span involves prolonged delay in the onset of age-associated diseases. While we all want to live to an old age, we want that to be a healthy, disease-free existence.

While research on short-lived animals has conclusively shown that fasting can and does prolong life span, studies on humans are ongoing and seek to ascertain whether calorie restriction can also increase human life span. Still, most scientific studies involving primates and human beings reveal this: In virtually all studies, fasting improves almost all indicators of good health measured in humans. Fasting can significantly reduce your risk of cancer, stroke, diabetes and such neurodegenerative diseases as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

In fact, while reviewing available scientific support for fasting to improve brain health, physicians from the National Institute on Aging's Intramural Research Program had this to say: "Two dietary strategies, caloric restriction and intermittent fasting, ... could potentially be used to mediate successful aging and forestall the onset of certain neurodegenerative disorders."

5 Factors That Influence Health

In a study published by the National Institutes of Health, the authors wrote: "Put simply, high energy intake increases, while low energy intake decreases, the risks of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancers and possibly neurodegenerative disorders."

Some scientists speculate that perhaps the reason certain regions of the world where people eat much less (either due to lack or cultural and religious considerations) seem to have much less incidence of cancer, stroke and other diseases may be due in part to the hormetic effect of calorie reduction.

Inversely, is it possible that the high prevalence of diseases associated with developed and industrialized nations stems—at least in part—from our overindulgence in food? Many scientists involved in healthy aging, nutritional studies and physiology seem to think so.

There are five main determinants of health used by medical and health practitioners around the world to gauge or guide the health care system: genetic disposition, social circumstances, environmental exposure, behavioral patterns and health care access. Of all these five health determinants, the biggest contributor to premature death in the United States is behavioral patterns.

Sadly, what this means is there is little or nothing your medical doctor can do about a major determinant of your health. Health care is different from health. A doctor's training prepares him well enough to solve your health problems rather than address prevention.

To boil it down to a simple fact, your health is your responsibility.

Stopping Premature Death

Imagine being able to cut your chance of dying prematurely by 40 percent or more. Put another way, there is a huge

opportunity to increase your health span—if not always your life span—by about 40 percent. The key is to take full personal responsibility for your health.

Quitting smoking is one sure way to improve your health span. Since a majority of us do not smoke, however, the next greatest opportunity there is to improve your health is caloric restriction. While there are different forms of fasting, the underlying principle behind scientific fasting is simply profound: Eating less could prolong your life and will definitely increase the disease-free period of your life.

The opportunity to positively impact your health also comes with a responsibility to act. In fact, the biggest advantage of caloric restriction—unlike exercise—is the opportunity to do little or nothing. Just eat less by skipping a meal or two occasionally.

Exercise and dietary considerations are two of the most important behavioral health determinants, yet research has shown that the single most important dietary factor is to skip a meal or two every now and then. In other words, eat less and live better.

You have the ability to fast occasionally. Except for those with health problems, almost everyone can and should fast.

There is no such thing as gaining “something for nothing.” Like all new habits, fasting may be painful at first. More than 70 years of research from some of the world’s most brilliant minds supports its practice. In other words, the facts are on your side.

Given the promise of fasting, particularly during the staggering health crisis that burdens the American system, initiating a plan today would seem a wise and prudent course of action. To paraphrase a familiar commercial: “Your stomach deserves a break today.”

Francis E. Umesiri is an assistant professor at John Brown University. He holds a doctorate in chemistry, with research focus in medicinal chemistry. For over 20 years, Umesiri has served in Christian ministry helping congregations and campus groups embrace the practical dimensions of God's grace.

Dr. Vikki Petersen explains the vast health benefits to intermittent fasting and why its not as hard as you think at .

If you liked the article, you'll love the book.

Find the motivation you need to seek God in fasting and prayer in Francis E. Umesiri's latest book, *Fasting for Life: Medical Proof Fasting Reduces Risk of Heart Disease, Cancer, and Diabetes* (Siloam). You can find this book at , or anywhere Christian books are sold.